

The Handout at the Back Door

EVERYBODY, IT SEEMS, RAILS AGAINST "GOVERNMENT SPENDING": WELFARE, SUBSIDIES AND GRANTS. BUT IN INYO COUNTY AND ELSEWHERE VERY FEW ARE WILLING TO SAY NO WHEN THE TAXES COME HOME

BACK IN THE 30's, an American president, faced with a critically worsening depression, found a new and revolutionary meaning to a Constitutional decree: "...promote the general welfare...." Since then, "government" has dispersed untold billions to cover almost every imaginable need. At first, the beggar at the back door was led into the living room and was allowed some say even as to how his dole would be given - and spent. But no more; volumes of regulations now govern his every action, and penetrate, sometimes capriciously, into every area of American life.

In the past two weeks an effort has been made to determine the impact of state and federal spending on Inyo County and the workings of its government - an effort largely unsuccessful since there seems to be no real comprehensive understanding - or record - of how much finally filters down in terms of tangibles to those who - finally - have to pay the bill.

Although it provides no real indicator of federal-state spending in Inyo County, a study by NEWS-LETTER staff members focused on government "grants" which, in Inyo County make up a whopping two-thirds of the entire county budget (about \$6 million out of about \$9 million total budget for fiscal '77-'78).

There exists in the office of the county administrator a "grant book." Catalogued in its more-than-500 pages are the many ways in which Uncle Sugar is willing to send money to Inyo County, and the terms on which he will send it.

In recent years in counties and cities all over America, department heads have often been

Holidays Vacation

The INYO COUNTY NEWS-LETTER staff will take a week's vacation during the Christmas holiday, and NEWS-LETTER will not reappear until the week of January 1.

NEWS-LETTER extends to its readers best wishes and the hope that the holiday ahead will bring joy and peace to all.

given promotions and raises - or their walking papers - purely on the basis of their expertise in making their local projects fit into the definitions provided in "the book." Called by its custodians and controllers the "federal assistance catalogue," and updated every now and then by them ("Them" is the Office of Management and Budget, directly under direction of the White House), it has become the Bible of fiscal well-being. Every county has one and it is doubtful if any county could survive without it.

In case the "book" is not enough, there is also a computer at UC-Davis which contains an elaboration of its data. A needful county administration can fill out a form, forward it to Davis, and - presto! - instant money, so long as all the terms are met. In most cases, the federal funds go first to the state government (the middle-man who administrates at great cost whatever the county will eventually gain), and then, having been purified in the mill of state-level fiscal alchemists, the funds trickle home to the courthouse. As one county official, Sheriff Floyd Barton, complains: "The grants are a paper-mill nightmare." And by the time the form-fillers (administrators) are finished "only a few bucks make it to the streets." Barton should

(See HANDOUT, Back of Green Page)

The **INYO COUNTY NEWS-LETTER**
A NEWS ALTERNATIVE - EASTERN SIERRA NEWS SERVICE
Compiled by John Heston and Benett Kessler
LIMITED CIRCULATION
Published weekly
ENJOY A SAFE,
HAPPY HOLIDAY
Week of
Dec. 19, 1977

THREAT TO SCHOOL FUNDS

SACRAMENTO'S ROBIN HOOD COMPLEX WOULD "REDISTRIBUTE" MONEY TO POOR DISTRICTS

An Assembly Bill that, in effect, takes money from wealthier school districts and passes it along to poorer districts, is seen by Inyo County school officials as a clear threat to Inyo's already-shakey school finances.

"AB 65" should be of tremendous concern to everyone in the county, says John Treacy, president of the Inyo County School Board, who views Sacramento's Keynesian Robin Hood approach with some dismay.

"The financial impact on schools could be a very big factor," he said.

Inyo schools in fact would appear to the unpracticed eye to be in good shape. Considering the number of tax dollars doled out to the area and then weighed against the number enrolled, the per capita student dollar is sizeable. "But," says Treacy, "this procedure fails to take into account the overhead and other school expenses which remain the same regardless of how few students we have." In that, Treacy referred to student population figures which have shown a sharp decline in recent years.

No matter. If the proponents and enforcers of AB65 have their way, Inyo County could be forced to return (or simply not receive) as much as 50% of its state funds. Treacy explains that the bill was passed by "those in urban areas" who took no account of rural school finan-

(See SCHOOLS, Page 6)

PAYING THE LAWYERS

A COURT MOTION FILED LAST WEEK DEMANDS THAT DWP PAY COSTS OF GROUNDWATER SUIT

Five years of lawsuits against the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has been a costly exercise; the bill so far, if rough figures are anywhere near correct, amounts now to about \$85,000 - and Inyo County wants it back.

Last week, the attorneys for the county, District Attorney L.H. Gibbons and Special Counsel Antonio Rossman, toted up the legal tab and presented it to the court for collection from DWP.

Rossman, recently returned from a trip to the Far East, appeared unsoftened by the Himalayan impressions and continued his hard-line stance against the department. The court, by ruling in favor of Inyo County in the suit for an environmental impact report on ground-

(See The COURTS, Page 6)

»»»» NOTES FROM B.K. ««



BENNETT KESSLER

ACTION AT MAMMOTH: A lot of snow, some of it "good powder," is the big draw at Mammoth, and the ski crowd - or should I say multitude - is pouring in. Another attraction, if you dig That Kind of music, will be Chuck Berry, one of the original R&R greats. He's to appear for a one-night gig at the Mammoth showcase, Warming Hut Number 2, Dec. 30. After Mammoth, Berry can be seen (and heard at his usual 90 decibels) on the network show that pays still another tribute to Elvis. That's to air sometime in early January. Mammoth promoters are having no trouble selling general admission tickets at Eight-fifty, for Berry, live.

WORD FROM MAMMOTH HAS IT that even if there is no more immediate snowfall, what is already on the slopes will "carry them through" 'til February.

DWP SWEARS they really will sell some property in Inyo County. Promising no song-and-dance this time, DWP carries the lot sale project to its board of water commissioners Dec. 22 where passage is expected. But then it's still up to the L.A. City Council. Before anyone gets his hopes up, however, let me tell you about a game I heard about from a friend: It seems the DWP commissioners are not above passing on something favorable to Inyo County; it looks good, public relationswise. Then a few private calls to friendly councilmen explaining that "look, we don't really want to do this....." and the council says no. The councilmen, not DWP, then look like the heavies, and nothing ever really happens. Same song and dance, just with different arrangements and staging.

PUBLISHED WORD FROM THE RADICAL FAR-RIGHT now has it that Eric Sevareid is a commie-traveler. Why is it that the superficial mind tends to confuse "wisdom" with "liberalism"? Sevareid's network, CBS, is considered by the other media to be, at least, right-of-center, and among his fellow workers, Sevareid is seen as a hard-back conservative, friendly to the GOP Old Guard. Sevareid understands all too well the follies of youth - his critics don't and have not outgrown them. B-52's, anyone?

BUT OF COURSE anyone with an IQ over 95 is always suspect. As Thoreau pointed out, the $1\frac{1}{2}$ wits are always thought to be crazy by those who are merely $\frac{1}{2}$ wits.

MEDIA IN THE EXTREME, either right or left, is merely a reflector of polarized elements. The great sin of some media members is not their political attitudes - that should be left up to the public anyway - but their lack of guts to present the news. The biggest lie of all is the truth left untold when it should be. And in that, Sevareid had no problems, even when, as he said, he was "scared" by the criminals then in office.

RIGHT? LEFT? ENJOY THE BEST OF BOTH: Do business with the conservatives, socialize with the

liberals. Never the reverse.

A RETURN TO INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY, added to good education; a desire to perform a day's honest work; respect for religious and natural law...and there'd be no concern of "right" and "left," and each considered merely dull.

STAY TUNED FOLKS. B.K. the pedagogue will be...

CHRISTMAS PARTIES EVERYWHERE. Who can keep up?! There's no escape, even by leaving town. And who can say no...

VERY PLEASANT PEOPLE DEPT: Big Pine's Enid Larson. Knowledgeable in a lot of things and in-to everything; Jim Angelo, hard-worker, energetic director of the county's parks and rec department who in a year is reported to have improved P&R's finances. That's something the taxpayer can appreciate these days.

MORE VPP'S: the "afternoon" crowd at Lone Pine's Mt. Whitney golf club. Also add Tom Poole of Independence (We've needed that plane of his - quick - more than once, and he is a top pilot.)

MEDIA NOTE: I betcha TIME Magazine soon takes a look at Owens Valley and the Eastern Sierra. How do I know? A little bird, a gull, told me.

MORE MEDIA NOTES: Our Man Heston appears on the Big Tube this Saturday night, a feature of the "In Search Of..." series. The network had planned to air the show in January, but out of the grab-bag of dates managed to pick Christmas Eve. ("There go the ratings," says Heston.) In the film, which has to do with gold mining, Heston philosophizes about "another kind of gold." On camera the newsman changes to his role as an owner of the Black Eagle Mine near Independence, and in one scene sets off some dynamite; he very nearly wiped out the film crew, rocks flying everywhere, but they came out unscathed and with what the producer, Richard Wells, called "a great shot." Heston, usually associated with Channels 2 and 7 in his newswork, will appear on Channel 4 (NBC) for this Saturday night's show.

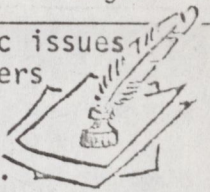
WHAT, NO TURKEY? Since the retirement of Jail Cook Mary Dawson (who took with her the recipes for pie and turkey), the inmates have dined on holiday fare provided by the kitchen of the county sanatorium system. (Deputies joke that the minor crimes committed by the very poor to gain entrance to the jail, have been on the decrease, since the holiday dinners lack the "home-cooked" touch.) For their yule feast, inmates this year will get stuffed ham rolls, yams, salad, croissant rolls, and pumpkin pie.

I'M COOKING UP SOMETHING ELSE: a short vacation....Meanwhile, may the news in your day be good news, every day....

Sincerely,

B.K.

NEWS-LETTER welcomes letters and comment relevant to public issues and the editors will publish those considered timely. Letters should not exceed 200 words and those with viewpoints concisely stated are those most likely to be published. Address your statement to INYO COUNTY NEWS-LETTER, Box 531, Independence 93526, or call (714) 878-2582 or 878-2381.



(Editors' note: With the approach of the Christmas season, the editors thought it appropriate to present a holiday message, and more or less randomly turned to the clergy. Among responses was this written for FORUM by Glynn C. Harper, vicar of Trinity Church, Lone Pine. The editors join with Vicar Harper in his view, and sincerely agree with the message implicit in his words.)

To your readers:

It is easy of course to parrot the familiar words we have heard all our lives, and still hear repeated so often that they lose their ability to register in our minds any real meaning:

"We celebrate at Christmas the coming into the world of the God-man, who by his life, his death on the cross, and finally his rising from the dead not only delivered us from death, but from the frustrations of that portion of our lives that we live out in this world."

Now, if we really stopped and tried to comprehend the magnitude of that great gift of God in the person and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we would be struck, I think, not with the superficial joy of the Christmas event, but rather with the deep, profound significance of the different way in which our lives can be seen - and lived - as a response to God's Grace in the gift of his Son.

Unfortunately, however, we generally look for, and expect the Christmas season to bring, joy, peace, and love in terms of what this world has to offer, and we fail to make the connection that ought to let us see beyond the veil of life here in this world - a life that goes on always in the shadow of pain, sorrow, and disappointment. Beyond the veil of our lives here lies the promised world that Christ will usher in when he returns - a return, by the way, that we also remember and celebrate during the Christmas season.

This sort of perspective - the ability to live with our eyes and hearts set on a world to come - is what we Christians call a Life in Christ. It is my conviction that one can never experience the "real meaning of Christmas" - the joy, peace, and love that is implicit in Christmas - until one understands and accepts as true the meaning of the Christ event itself. It is also my conviction that Christ cannot be understood or experienced apart from his earthly body, the church. Looking elsewhere, in parties, in gifts, in sparkling decorations, will only end in disillusionment, in a feeling of having been betrayed by the holiday, and sometimes in the sort of despair that yearly drives people to take their own lives during the Christmas season. Having found the real meaning of Christmas, however, will bring all the joy we have been taught to expect in the parties, gifts, and decorations, for they will be seen as expressions of the greater joy that underlies their use.

The real meaning of Christmas can be found by beginning a relationship this year with one of the local Christian Churches. The area is blessed with an abundance of good Christian congregations that offer every shade and sort of Christian expression. All of them are celebrating the birth of Christ in a manner that reveals "the real meaning of Christmas" and any one of them can help a person find that real meaning in his or her own life.

I can offer a sincere and heartfelt invitation to join with Trinity Church...I am also confident that I can extend an invitation on behalf of every Christian Church in Lone Pine, Independence and Bishop to be with them at their services on Christmas. Any one of these Christian congregations has the secret of the "real meaning of Christmas" and they will be overjoyed to share it with anyone who asks.....

God Bless you this Christmas Season,

-Glynn C. Harper

(NEWS-LETTER wishes to thank Vicar Harper for the foregoing message. By way of mention, it might be added that the Rev. Harper's own services are at midnight on Christmas Eve, beginning with a carol-singing at 10:30 p.m., Communion at 11 p.m. Readers should contact other churches for times of various denominational services - and participate in them.)

COPY OF RESIGNATION TO FORUM

Dear Wilma (Supervisor Muth)

This letter will serve as a reminder that my term as an Inyo County Planning Commissioner expires on the thirty-first day of December, this year.

I do not wish to be reappointed. Kay and I have a long-planned program for next year, which will involve extensive traveling and major absences from Inyo County.

If the new Commissioner would like to get a preview on the workings of the commission I would be most willing to help in any way desired. Hopefully, attendance at the December meeting could be arranged, plus any other informal "get togethers" that might be considered useful.

I appreciate having had the opportunity to serve Inyo County and to have seen it grow and prosper in a more orderly fashion than in the past. Changes are of course necessary, and hopefully will bring an enhanced life style to the peoples of the various communities.

Sincerely,
Glenn Meyer

To you is born
this day
in the city
of David
a Savior,
who is
Christ the Lord.

News Briefs

"AIRPORT PLAN" COMMITTEE

Although some observers feel she may have stacked the deck by her suggested appointments, the board went along with her - and Supervisor Wilma Muth says her proposed committee to work on the long-standing "Airport Plan" at Bishop will get it rolling. "The project has been talked about too long."

The project would develop the area near Bishop airport; but there are other alternative sites for Bishop's hoped-for expansion.

Dr. Carl Lind, long interested in the area near the airport, joins with Chamber of Commerce man Jim Lackey, and Bob Young, on Muth's committee. There is neither opposition nor even argument with the committee, but there have been hopes expressed that the committee will consider other areas than the airport. Muth said "There has been eighteen years of talk of setting up an area at the 'Y', but nothing has been presented on the idea."

As in most Inyo County projects, the DWP will enter into the matter since DWP owns most available land. As for proposed developments, DWP Engineer Jim Wickser says he doesn't know who to talk to "about the whole thing." In other words, there is no central "authority" to plan with, a problem which may be solved by the committee appointments.

Meanwhile, at Independence, Planning Director Doug Sherburne avers there will be other citizens advisory groups on planning efforts in the Bishop area. He said last week that a few "citizens" previously had "had their motors running and ready to go, but there was no road laid out to follow."

Sherburne's department may in fact determine direction. Muth said she feels the planning department, recently under fire from the board, "now has guidance and can do an excellent job."

Excellent job or no, the supervisors will continue their "in-depth look at the department."

PIO SEARCH

The supervisors have come full circle on their plan for a public relations, or public information, project for the county in its fight with DWP: It was first proposed that the county contract for such service. That was replaced by a proposal to hire a full-time PIO. The job was advertised and nearly a hundred responses poured in - many from unemployed newsmen in the Southland. The committee of supervisors looking into the matter will sift through the lot, but now the plan may have changed: some are in favor of going back to the original proposal. They hope to discover someone, or some firm, with both the expertise and the time, to handle the county's media case.

TV NEWS AND MONO GULLS

Los Angeles television news directors expressed interest in a NEWS-LETTER account of the gull rookery problem at Mono Lake. When a group of conservationists carry through a plan to dredge the shallow water near Negit Island (no longer an island, thanks to receding lake waters), their TV crews will be on hand.

Spearheading the conservation effort is

David Winkler, a UC-Davis scientist who has written a lengthy and scholarly report on the plight of the second largest gull rookery in the world - and what may befall it when predators cross the "bridge" to the island. Winkler now awaits a cost estimate to dredge - or dynamite - the bridge. But even that amounts to only a "temporary measure." Winkler says other measures will be taken - perhaps in court - to protect the gulls and the lake. The area's top predator is the Department of Water and Power which, since the 30's has drained off the waters that used to keep Mono Lake brimming.

SMOKEY BEAR'S A SCROOGE

No more Christmas Tree cutting on Inyo National Forest land; that's the word from USFS headquarters at Bishop. Said the Forest Service Information Officer Tom Sayre: "The Inyo Forest doesn't have a heavy, dense stand of trees that can be cut and remain abundant. It's a dry area, and tree rotation is slower there."

"Anyway," continues Sayre, "we don't manage the forest for Christmas Trees, but more for timber, and if we opened things up to any individual who wants a tree, it would be a problem for administration."

Exempt from the USFS ruling: Civic and service groups who cut and sell the trees to raise funds. Their efforts have not been much rewarded; sales are "down" this year as compared with previous years when lots were cleared out within hours after sales began. A recent trend to purchase "living" Christmas trees may have cut into sales, especially with prices ranging from \$1-per-foot upward.

Inyo cattlemen say that the recent rainfall is "better than last year." One of them, Lone Pine's Sandy Kemp, said last week that the rain "softens up" dry desert brush so that cattle will eat it, "that is, if it doesn't get too cold." Weather forecasters meanwhile are cautiously suggesting that "normal" weather patterns are returning to California, a suggestion based on storm-direction between Washington state and Alaska.

Claims against Ramos Construction Company for work done on the Bishop sewer project are being paid. In recent days, Ramos' top supplier - Nikolaus and Nikolaus - have received about a \$100,000 and County Administrator John K. Smith said others who had filed "stop notices" with the county, will be paid in the near future. Meanwhile, the Ramos project nears final completion and final inspection will take place "sometime next month." After that: final hookups to homes and business firms in the area that the \$4 million line will serve.

A statewide cutback in Greyhound Bus service will reduce bus schedules in Inyo County. Last week it was announced from Greyhound officials at Sacramento: As of January 4, only one northbound, another southbound, will make the L.A.-Reno run, and meet at Lone Pine at 3:23 p.m. daily. Greyhound says that, except for holidays, "there's just not that many passengers anymore," this in spite of long-distance and tour rate reductions initiated in recent months.

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HANDOUTS, Continued

know: For more than five years he has worked toward a long-needed expansion of jail and law enforcement projects. One a grant of about a half a million dollars, the various projects got underway only last month. Most of the time in between was filled with endless trips, conferences - and the ever-present need to "fill out forms." But red-tape or not, the sheriff seeks other grants. Barton is going after what he calls "hardware grants," these to cover the cost of radio equipment, etc. "Software grants" cover a cadet program - and the cost of hiring personnel. The latter grant holds certain pitfalls; when the "grant money" runs out, the extra help must be fired, or the county must pay for an additional position.

Barton's grant money comes from a federal aid to law enforcement program. The abuses in the program have run to such excesses as the purchase of army tanks (for some southern law enforcement agencies still fearful of racial problems). Barton scoffs at such expenditures, but locally he sees valid uses for at least a little of the federal tax-money, and concurs with the current presidential enquiry into the law enforcement program.

On an annual basis, it is difficult to arrive at exact figures. For instance, a portion of Inyo's grant funds covers several years, as in the case of the Bishop sewer project funding (about \$4 million in all) spread over the period from planning to completion. However, a rough estimate is available. Below are listed a few current grant projects in Inyo, along with a brief look into what the money goes for, and what its recipients think about it.

SANATORIUMS: About \$460,000, currently. Director Mike Cosenza says his department provides legal services, a nutrition program, remodelling of senior citizens' centers, training for nurses aides, etc. About "six or seven" additional grants are "in the mill" in Cosenza's department. If, said Cosenza, his time is figured at 150%, then a full two-thirds of it is taken up in dealing with grants. "There's a whole school of study on grants. A field of its own. If you can write well-documented narratives and know something about accounting, and meeting the objectives of the laws, you can get the grants."

HEALTH DEPARTMENT: \$113,500 for '77-'78. Barbara Albright, director of health services, said "If the county were paying for these services, we wouldn't have them. Current grants cover such health extension aids as a mobile clinic van, a child health and disability program, maternal child health program, family planning and immunization maintenance, and public health nurses.

PARKS AND RECREATION: \$200,000-plus. Director Jim Angelo (considered by the county administration as one of Inyo's "sharpest" in getting grant dollars) says he is limited in his projects since he is unable to get grants for projects on leased land unless the county holds 20-year leases. Since the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is the actual owner of most Inyo parkland, and refuses to give the county more than a five-year lease, the county is the loser by hundreds of thousands of dollars. Current grant programs cover improvements on the Millpond park at Bishop, and tennis courts at Independence.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT: About \$31,000.

The funds cover the cost of one planner working in the IMAGE program, and \$15,000 for an assistant planner.

LIBRARY: \$47,000 current, more proposed. Monies obtained will expand the Bishop library and associated costs. The library has applied for an additional \$24,000 for a book-mobile to provide services in remote areas.

PUBLIC WORKS: \$1½ million-plus. By far, the largest grants go to this department, and it is difficult to draw a line between "public works" and other departments for which it does the work paid for through other grants. At present, airport upgrading is the major expenditure, along with road construction and maintenance.

PROBATION DEPARTMENT: \$4,000 at present. Probation Officer John Lee says his comparatively small grant covers the cost of "a multitude of changes in regard to AB 3121," which is a new juvenile law. Otherwise, the probation department uses little by way of grants.

In Inyo County, as elsewhere, the federal and state spending programs come under heavy criticism. And there are many questions about what the money is spent for. A larger political issue often arises out of various expenditures. For instance: Should federal or state or county money be provided to pay for birth control pills for teen-agers? (Family planning); but then, too, should similar monies be paid (a far larger cost) to provide tennis courts for a tiny percent of the population that plays tennis? How many private pilots (a small population percentage) will benefit from various airport projects? And the questions could go on and on - especially in a county which only three years ago listed a full 63% of its county budget to "welfare-related" costs. How, for instance, can political positions define the difference between what some call "welfare abuses" and "cash subsidies" to big business or big agriculture since the money comes from the same source. Here again, sociological - even class - distinctions, are a factor. Even road improvements become, in the eyes of one without an automobile, a waste of tax dollars that could better be spent for, who knows, maybe AUTOMOBILES.

It is a certain fact though: Rich and poor alike have their hands in the federal pocket, even as they claim "unfair!" And few are they who know how to say no.

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The WATER ISSUE

OFFICIALS FINDING MORE "SNOW" AT
CONFERENCES THAN ON THE MOUNTAIN

Not for a minute does any of the county's legal heads think the DWP will give up its grab for groundwater when a court-permitted pumping spree ends April 1.

The district attorney's office, aided by a special counsel hired by the county two years ago, is loading up its legal guns in preparation for the day when - if not convinced otherwise - the state court might give Los Angeles its longest drink of all; an unthinkable ruling which, in the eyes of Inyo, would be the meanest of April Fool Jokes.

The DWP would have to form its plea on the basis of continuing drought, a factor which now only the forces of nature might accurately predict. But DWP's Duane Georgeson issued a televised statement over the weekend which serves, more or less, as fair warning that DWP sees the recent rain and snowfall as a mere drop in L.A.'s sizeable bucket.

Georgeson was dragged out into the snow-flecked mountains by a television crew this past weekend to make on-camera pronouncements about the drought and the Southland's need for water. He observed while standing in shallow snow that "only about an inch" of moisture had fallen thus far and that "about 15 inches" of moisture might be a more convincing drought-breaker. Aired on the Sunday night news, the statement stood starkly as a signal of L.A.'s summertime needs.

Back in Inyo County, Owens Valley DWP Engineer Jim Wickser had already said last week that the department "may" go back to court to ask for an extension of the "temporary increased pumping order."

The restrained statements of DWP officialdom often leave newsmen with the vague feeling that DWP would actually like to lose its temper and tell the media that hell, yes we're going back to court, our careers depend on it.

Inyo's legal counsel is not unaware of the

edginess - and implicit willingness to fight - in DWP's statements. As for the April 1 deadline District Attorney L.H. Gibbons says confidently "The county will be prepared for whatever may occur."

AND FROM THE SUMMIT, NO NEWS AND LITTLE HEADWAY

"I feel like I'm in the United Nations; It's very difficult to get everybody to see eye-to-eye. Sometimes it seems like we spend hours over one word." Such was the complaint voiced late last week by County Administrator John K. Smith after another of the "attorney general's conferences," latest of which was held Wednesday at Sacramento.

One of an ongoing series called by the attorney general, the meeting again called together top officials representing DWP, Inyo, Department of Water Resources and others concerned in a statewide battle for water. It had been the A.G.'s hope that such a confluence of dedicated sincerity might effect a water program suitable to all. Such hopes may prove naive, if progress made so far is any indicator.

At the start of the meetings, the DWP's people called for a press blackout, and in what they call "a spirit of cooperation" the county's officials say they are "going along with it."

As a consequence, information as to what goes on in the closed meetings is about as plentiful as last year's mountain snow. The run-off so far indicates that no one is really sure if there has been any progress. The district attorney cagily reports that "We will know in a month or two whether the meetings are productive."

Newsmen see in Gibbons' "month or two" time designation a date very nearly approaching the groundwater pumping limit date - and they speculate that the "summit" talks may be dealing with that matter. Meanwhile, in February, the DWP begins its annual snow surveys - and if the surveyors find less than an avalanche on every slope it is thought they'll be back in the courts pleading "drought."

INYO YULE

TURKEY AND WHITE CHRISTMAS, BUT NO R2D2

Youngsters everywhere are asking Santa to bring "Star Wars" toys this year. No luck. The best they'll be getting in that line is a coupon - amounting to a promissory note - saying the manufacturer (who bought all the 'Star Wars' name items) will deliver sometime in coming months. A Bishop toy shop reports shoppers bringing the coupons to his shop. Doubtful buyers are wondering if the youngster will really be interested in a 2-inch R2D2 that even now is barely past the design stage - sometime in May.

No shortage of turkey for Mom's Christmas feast - and no lack of buyers, either. One retailer, the comparatively small Mairs' Market at Independence, reports sales have already gone beyond 90. Inyo County's various outlets, including the large Safeway and Joseph's stores, are expected to sell thousands. Prices remain at about the same level as in the past three years.

Santa Claus will make his appearance as usual atop the courthouse - an annual specta-

cular for Inyo County that draws hundreds of the area youngsters. The big happening is at 6:30 p.m., Christmas Eve. A Civic Club project.

No rave reviews on Independence's street decorations. But no adverse criticism either, since no one can see them without difficulty.

Kooky gift: Someone called a Bishop shop asking for "an adjustable ski pants suit for a pregnant lady." It was all for her Christmas trip.

About 100 Inyo people will be out of the area - as far away as New York and Miami - and a few even to Spain. Christmas vacations are becoming increasingly popular, says a spokesman for Bishop's Sierra Travel Service.

A real chance for a "White Christmas," if the projected forecasts are to be believed. The weather station's Jim Savage says end-of-week storms may bring moisture and cold.

Youngsters can "talk to Santa" on Thursday and Friday - compliments of Pine Creek Lions Club - The number: 387-2303, 6-9 p.m.

COURTS, Continued

water pumping, "vindicated" the county position, as Rossman and Gibbons firmly believe. Says the special counsel: "The DWP behaved in bad faith, grossly mis-stating the facts."

"Not only that, but Inyo County benefited a lot of people (by its lawsuit): The L.A. water conservation program is a direct result." Rossman explained his "bad faith" claim by recalling a DWP effort to win over Inyo County's cattle producers; (from the cattlemen's association, DWP representatives managed to get a signed statement supporting groundwater pumping. The cattlemen, later embarrassed by what appeared to many to be a sell-out, privately retracted the statement explaining they were "desperate" for DWP's irrigation water.)

The lawyers' motion to recover attorney fees is not uncommon in some cases in which a plaintiff has won the point of his claim. The \$85,000 figure was considered by some observers as a "modest" figure based on the many hours attorneys devoted to the case; it in no way covers hundreds of thousands of dollars expended by the county in the overall groundwater pumping issue. The figure is also considered small when measured by the future expenditures expected in bringing DWP to its knees in Inyo County. Both county officials and their attorneys foresee a long battle ahead not only in the groundwater pumping matter, but later in areas of land and economic impact.

The court itself apparently saw merit in the motion to collect; it promptly set a hearing date for January 17.

SCHOOLS, Continued

cial structure. He said that state officials are still considering "formulas" that may take the edge off the state-level education knife.

The county's schools are now struggling for survival. But, in fact, there are many far poorer, many of these situated in high-population centers which in the eye of state administrators pack considerable clout at Sacramento.

Hardest hit, says Treacy, could be the Owens Valley School at Independence. In a recent election, the school managed to win additional funds, but these too could be cut under some of the terms of the new legislation.

Where to, now? Treacy says about 20 rural counties in California are harboring similar concerns. But all are "working with the legislature" in an effort to assure what they hope will be "equitable" systems for all. In that, for now, they have no guarantees.



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